



Federal Legislative Update

Quarter 4, December 2017



Introduction

The Texas Workforce Investment Council's *Federal Legislative Update* is published on a quarterly basis and informs stakeholders about developments in federal legislation that may impact workforce policy for Texas.

Recent Highlights from Congress

Apprenticeship

The third annual National Apprenticeship Week was held November 13-19, 2017. Throughout the week, local community colleges, employers, and union organizations with apprenticeship programs hosted open houses to showcase their programs, facilities, and apprentices. This annual event also provides organizations with an opportunity to highlight how registered apprenticeship meets the need for a skilled workforce.

In other apprenticeship news, President Trump issued an executive order designed to expand apprenticeships to train people for millions of unfilled jobs. The executive order called for the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary to establish a task group on apprenticeship expansion and to identify strategies and proposals to promote apprenticeship. The task group met November 13, 2017, with most of the discussion focused on expanding apprenticeship programs to fill a growing skills gap. Next steps for the task group will be to create smaller committees within the group to make recommendations.

Appropriations

Congress passed a continuing resolution in September to fund the government at the current funding levels through December 8, 2017. Congress then passed another short-term continuing resolution to fund the government through December 22, 2017. President Trump signed continuing appropriations bill HR 1370 on December 22, 2017 extending federal funding through January 19, 2018.

President Trump's proposed budget for FY 2018 includes steep cuts to workforce and education programs. The U.S. Department of Labor's budget includes a \$2.5 billion (or 21 percent) cut, including a 40 percent cut to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) formula grants. The U.S. Department of Education budget includes a \$9 billion cut, including a 15 percent cut to Pell grants and a 16 percent cut to adult education state grants.

The House version of the funding bill would cut WIOA by three percent and eliminate Wagner-Peyser funding but would include funding for apprenticeship programs. The proposal would also rescind \$3.3 billion in Pell grant funding.

The Senate version of the funding bill would maintain funding levels for WIOA programs and rescind \$2.6 billion in Pell grant funding but would increase the maximum amount of Pell grants that are allowed.

Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act is the primary law governing postsecondary education, including funding for student financial assistance, Pell grants, and student loans. The act is also a major source for institutional support. The Higher Education Act was reauthorized in 2008 with some significant changes in 2010 as part of the last budget reconciliation.

On December 1, 2017, the House introduced the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act. The overarching features of the bill include:

- simplifying and improving student aid;
- promoting innovation, access, and completion;
- empowering students and families to make informed decisions; and
- ensuring strong accountability and a limited federal role.

The Senate has yet to introduce a higher education bill, but there is discussion that a bill may be introduced in the first quarter of 2018.

Pell Reauthorization Update

On May 4, 2017, members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce introduced the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act to improve career and technical education. The act also reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

The legislation is bipartisan and will help individuals enter the workforce with the knowledge and skills needed to compete for in-demand jobs. The bill also:

- provides more flexibility in using federal resources;
- supports innovative learning opportunities and addresses state and local needs;
- increases transparency and accountability; and
- ensures the federal role is limited.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act passed in the House and was received in the Senate. The Senate has yet to take action due to disputes with language in the bill relating to the role of the secretary of education. The Senate also disagrees with the education funding formulas as written by the House.

Other Workforce-Related Legislation

The following bills were recently introduced and will continue to be monitored throughout the 115th Congress. Bill summaries may include information from GovTrack and the Library of Congress.

HR 3774 – The Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act. This bill would amend the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to give community colleges access to the transcripts of students who once attended but transferred to other schools. This would allow the community colleges to award associate's degrees to transfer students when they have accumulated necessary credits elsewhere.

HR 3785 – The Middle School STEP Act. This bill would support the development of a pilot program for middle school career exploration programs linked to career and technical education programs of study. The pilot program would include work-based learning methods or apprenticeships, career exploration, and career and labor market information.

HR 4078 – Expanding America's Workforce Act. This bill includes several provisions aimed at supporting job training through postsecondary education systems. A new type of Pell grant would cover job training programs of eight to 12 weeks in length. This tuition assistance would be available to both people without high school diplomas and people who already have college degrees. The bill would call on the Departments of Labor and Education to develop a system for articulating apprenticeship training into college credit. It would also mandate that credits from identical academic programs of the same level, if approved by the same accrediting agency, be automatically transferable between colleges.

HR 4115 – The Promoting Apprenticeships through Regional Training Networks for Employers Act. This bill would authorize a \$15 million Department of Labor program that provides grants to states in order to defray the costs of classroom training, known as related instruction, for apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs.

HR 4125 – The Pell Grant Modernization Act. This bill would promote apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs for small and medium sized employers within in-demand industry sectors through the establishment and support of industry or sector partnerships.

HR 4272 – The Community Partnerships in Education Act. This bill will amend both the Higher Education Act and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to require stakeholders and intermediaries to participate in planning, guiding, implementing, and delivering federal career and technical education programs.

HR 4286 – The Veterans Employment Training Act. This bill would authorize a Department of Labor grant program to fund and develop customized training programs for veterans.

HR 4380 – The Better Jobs for Veterans Act. This bill would restore the Veteran Retraining Assistance Program, which provides benefits for technical training to older and unemployed veterans. The Department of Defense would be required to develop a database of military training that may be accessed by employers or state occupational licensing agencies to verify skills.

HR 4479 – The Student Right to Know Before You Go Act. This bill will require the Department of Education to update its data warehouse in order to provide data on student graduation rates, debt, earnings, and other measures.

HR 4508 – The Opening Doors for Youth Act. The bill aims to simplify and improve student aid; promote innovation, access, and completion; empower students and families to make informed decisions; and ensure strong accountability and a limited federal role in education.

HR 4633 – The Credentialing, Educating and Relevant Training Initiative For our Heroes Act. This bill would allow members of the military who are using the tuition assistance program from the Department of Defense to apply their benefits to licensing, credentialing, and certification programs offered by entities other than an institution of higher education.

SB 1841 – The National Apprenticeship Act. This bill would amend the National Apprenticeship Act to require that state agencies registering apprenticeships on behalf of the federal Office of Apprenticeship decide on program applications within 90 days. If they do not approve or reject programs in that timeframe, applications would go to the federal office, which would have 30 days to make a determination.